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ABSTRACT

Noting an emerging consensus of opinion on the need for balance in early literacy instruction, this paper examines three overlapping phases of early literacy: novice (ages 5-7; prekindergarten, kindergarten, and grade 1); beginning (ages 6-8, kindergarten-grade 2); and advanced beginning (ages 7-9, grades 1-3). The first section describes young children's developing knowledge of written language during the progression from novice to advanced beginning literacy. Given this foundation, the second section describes the elements of balanced early literacy instruction and offers a set of indicators that educators can use to evaluate the extent to which the classroom early literacy program is balanced. The final section suggests several alternatives for adopting, adapting, or designing a core early literacy program. The paper concludes by noting that regardless of the option that is selected, it is important for every district to align its early literacy curriculum with state or national standards. It is also important for every school to implement an early literacy curriculum that is consistent with developmentally-sound standards and reflective of data from performance-driven assessments. Contains 76 references and a table listing the indicators of balanced programs; appendixes contain a list of entire-school reform models and a list of English language arts skill- and content-based reform models. (Author/RS)

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In the Beginning: Helping All Children Achieve Early Literacy

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Abstract

In recent years, there has emerged a consensus of opinion on the need for balance in early literacy instruction. The challenge is to create an enriching and motivating core program in which children are reading and writing meaningful, connected text and integrating oral and written language while actively engaged in clear, consistent, and explicit instruction in the skills and strategies of reading and writing. Such an approach will enable almost all children to achieve the national early literacy goal of independence in reading age-appropriate material by the end of grade 3.

In 1986, the term *emergent literacy* was first used to describe the gradual development of literacy from birth to age 5 (Sulzby & Teale, 1996). The term *early literacy* has been suggested to differentiate the development of literacy during the early elementary school years when children are typically in kindergarten-grade 3 (Hiebert & Raphael, 1998). This paper examines three overlapping phases of early literacy:

- **NOVICE** (ages 5-7; prekindergarten, kindergarten, and grade 1)
- **BEGINNING** (ages 6-8; kindergarten-grade 2)
- **ADVANCED BEGINNING** (ages 7-9, grades 1-3)

Once children achieve the status of advanced beginners, generally by age 9, they are able to read age-appropriate materials independently and are ready to use their reading and writing skills for life-long learning.

The first section of this paper describes young children's developing knowledge of written language during the progression from novice to advanced beginning literacy. Given this foundation, the second section describes the elements of balanced early literacy instruction and offers a set of indicators that educators can use to evaluate the extent to which the classroom early literacy program is balanced. The final section suggests several alternatives for adopting, adapting, or designing a core early literacy program. The paper concludes by noting that regardless of the option that is selected, it is important for every district to align its early literacy curriculum with state or national standards and every school to implement an early literacy curriculum that is consistent with developmentally-sound standards and reflective of data from performance-driven assessments.

In the Beginning: Helping All Children Achieve Early Literacy

Introduction

It has been more than a decade since the Commission on Reading issued the report, *Becoming a Nation of Readers*. That landmark report called for balanced early literacy instruction emphasizing explicit instruction and practice in word recognition and spelling strategies along with daily opportunities to read and write meaningful, connected text (Anderson et al.,1985). Since that time, literacy educators have gradually come together to endorse balanced instruction consisting of a blend of approaches that both emphasize the "centrality of word recognition" and acknowledge that the "ultimate purpose of reading is comprehension" (Stanovich, 1996). Indeed, today's researchers and practitioners alike are not arguing the need for balance, as was the case in 1985, but rather are debating what constitutes the best mix of ingredients in a balanced early literacy instructional program. The challenge is to create an enriching and motivating core early literacy program in which children are reading and writing meaningful, connected text and integrating oral and written language while simultaneously engaged in clear, consistent, and explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, word recognition and fluency, comprehension skills and strategies, writing process, and spelling (Snow et al., 1998). This shift in the dialogue on early literacy instruction is in striking contrast to the rhetoric of some politicians and fringe elements in American society who persist in trying to convince the American public that the "reading wars" are ongoing (Steinberg, 1997).

Despite the convergence of opinion on the need for balance in early literacy instruction and the expressed confidence of literacy educators in their knowledge of the ingredients necessary for young children to be able to read fluently with comprehension by the end of grade 3, the unnerving truth is that far too many children currently fail to achieve this goal. The recent National Education Goals Panel report (1997), for example, documents little progress in early literacy achievement as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) from 1992 to 1994, the most recent date of available information. "Forty percent of America's fourth graders cannot read at what the NAEP considers to be the basic level. Seventy percent fall below the proficient level" (U.S. Department of Education, 1997, p.7). Furthermore, substantial disparities are reported in the percentages of white and minority children who achieve early literacy.

In 1997, the U.S. Department of Education identified seven national priorities that were consistent with President Clinton's "Call-to-Action for American Education" in his fifth State of the Union Address. There is no doubt that achieving Priority 1, "reading independently and well by the end of third grade" (U.S. Department of Education, 1997, p. 1) requires a comprehensive effort on the part of federal and state governments, communities, families, and educators in universities and local school districts alike. However, almost all students, by some accounts at least 98-99% of all young children, should be successful in achieving this early literacy goal if they have access to a balanced, core early literacy instructional program and, when needed, additional

early intervention tutoring. Slavin (1997a) argues that such a program will benefit the "natural readers," the 40-50% of all students who learn to read regardless of the quality of instruction by maximizing their potential to read to learn in later years; the "teachable readers," the 30-40% of students who might not otherwise learn to read effectively without carefully crafted balanced instruction; and the "tutorable readers," as much as 30% of students who will learn to read effectively only if they have access to a high quality balanced classroom instructional program and supplemental, intensive one-on-one early intervention tutoring. Slavin concludes that all but 1-2% of children are truly dyslexic or so severely impaired behaviorally that they find learning to read extraordinarily difficult even when provided with intensive one-on-one tutoring in addition to a balanced core early literacy program. In his view, a goal of "neverstreaming" is attainable for almost all children because the need for special education will be greatly diminished if schools take the needed steps to improve regular classroom instruction (Slavin, 1996).

Teale and Sulbzy first used the term *emergent literacy* in 1986 to describe the gradual development of literacy from birth to age five (Sulzby & Teale, 1996). The term *early literacy* has been suggested to describe the development of literacy from ages five to eight (Hiebert & Raphael, 1998) when children are typically in kindergarten to grade 3. This paper examines three overlapping phases of early literacy:

- **NOVICE** (ages 5-7, prekindergarten, kindergarten, and grade 1)
- **BEGINNING** (ages 6-8, kindergarten-grade 2)
- **ADVANCED BEGINNING** (ages 7-9, grades 1-3).

Once children achieve the status of advanced beginners, generally by age 9, they are able to read age-appropriate materials independently and are ready to use their reading and writing skills for life-long learning (Chall, 1983; McGee & Richgels, 1996).[1]

It is important for educators to be knowledgeable about young children's developing concepts about language and literacy if they are to evaluate properly the extent to which the instructional program facilitates the acquisition of these concepts. The first section of this paper describes concepts acquired during the progression from novice to advanced beginning literacy. Given this foundation, the second section describes the elements of balanced early literacy instruction and offers a set of indicators that educators can use to evaluate the extent to which the classroom early literacy program is balanced . The final section suggests several alternatives for adopting, adapting, or designing a core early literacy program. The paper concludes by noting that regardless of the option that is selected, it is important for every district to align its early literacy curriculum with state or national standards and every school to implement an early literacy curriculum that is consistent with developmentally-sound standards and reflective of data from

[1]In keeping with the national early literacy goal, this paper extends the early literacy period to age 9.

performance-driven assessments.[2]

Young Children's Developing Understandings about Language and Literacy

Early literacy refers to the developmental period when young children gradually acquire the conventional literacy abilities they will need to become independent readers and writers. An important step toward improving early literacy instruction is to understand how young children develop concepts about language and literacy. Such an understanding provides a foundation for constructing more effective core early literacy programs.

Although no comprehensive model of reading acquisition exists to address fully the psychological, social, and instructional components of the process of learning to read (Juel, 1996), several educators have proposed stage models to describe qualitative changes in children's ability to decode print (Chall, 1983; Ehri, 1996; Ehri & Wilce, 1987; Gough & Hillinger, 1980; Gough et al., 1983; Juel, 1996). Educators generally acknowledge that the central achievement of the early literacy period is gaining access to the meaning of written language by acquiring independence in decoding and encoding print. Two understandings are believed to be fundamental to young children's acquisition of the ability to read and write an alphabetic language: First, spoken words are composed of a sequence of speech sounds and, second, the sequence of speech sounds within spoken words is associated with a sequence of printed symbols that comprise written words.

Observable changes in young children's attentiveness to print signal the initial transition from emergent to early literacy and subsequent transitions within early literacy to greater independence in decoding print for text comprehension. The stage models that focus on decoding generally characterize this progression as a series of three stages:

- **Stage 0** (Chall, 1983) is a logographic phase of "visual cue reading" (Ehri, 1996) in which novice readers attend to "selective cues" rather than to specific associations of spelling and sound (Juel, 1996).
- **Stage 1** (Chall, 1983)is a transitional alphabetic phase (Ehri, 1996) in which beginning readers attend to "partial phonetic cues"; it includes both the "phonetic cue" phase of initial reading and the "alphabetic" phase of phonological recoding.
- **Stage 2** (Chall, 1983) describes a shift from phonetic decoding to decoding by analogy by which children attend to word family patterns and then to orthographic reading by which readers seemingly decode words automatically on the basis of their spelling (Ehri, 1996). Such automaticity leads to fluent and efficient decoding.

While the decoding of print lies at the heart of the early literacy acquisition, the development of early literacy also involves the acquisition of many other important concepts about language. To address early literacy learning more comprehensively than the decoding stage models, McGee

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[2]For further information on alignment, see Liebling, C.R. (1997). *Achieving standards-based curriculum alignment through mindful teaching*. Portsmouth, NH: RMC Research Corporation.

and Richgels (1996) describe young children's developing knowledge about meaning, form, meaning-form links, and functions in written language communication during early literacy. The following section adapts McGee's and Richgel's categories to summarize the development of understanding about meaning, word recognition, comprehension and composition strategies, and the functional use of written language as children advance through novice, beginning, and advanced beginning phases of early literacy.[3]

It is important to bear in mind that in any given early literacy classroom, a teacher is likely to be working with a diverse group of young children whose overall literacy suggests placement in one of these phases. However, there is **a wide range of normally developing literacy behaviors during this period. While particular understandings may be most characteristic of children of specific ages or grade levels, the indicated ages and grade levels are intended only as guidelines**. What is most important is the gradual acquisition of literacy understandings over time. The pace of literacy learning during this period varies considerably with individual children, but by the end of grade 3, it is expected that most children will have acquired the literacy understandings that will enable them to achieve the early literacy standards established by states and districts and the national early literacy goal.

Phase I: NOVICE READERS AND WRITERS

The novice early literacy phase roughly encompasses children ages 5-7 who are typically in preschool, kindergarten, or grade 1. During the novice phase, children are learning the following concepts about oral and written language.

- **Learning how to mean**. During the novice phase, children have no difficulty comprehending stories read aloud because they understand thousands of words by age 6. Although lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic competence continue to develop throughout the elementary school years, young children's ability to communicate effectively in spoken language is also well established by age 6. By the end of kindergarten, children are generally knowledgeable about the appropriate use of language in particular social situations and can vary their language choices with respect to formality and explicitness for specific communicative purposes.

  Perhaps most important to the use of written language for communicative purposes is the development of an understanding about an author's intent to communicate meaning to readers by means of written language. Novice literacy learners have grown to rely on the spoken language communicative context to support a speaker's meaning in conversational exchange. Now they must learn that written language, just as spoken language, can be used to share ideas and emotions, but the separation in time and space of writers and readers necessitates more attentiveness to meaning expressed

[3]In contrast, McGee and Richgels (1996) discuss four phases of emergent and early literacy: literacy beginnings (birth-age 3); novice (ages 3-5); experimenting (ages 5-7), and conventional (ages 6-8).

through written language independent of a larger communicative context.

Frequent opportunities to listen to books read aloud and to reread familiar books independently provide the needed interaction with literature that promotes understanding of the author-reader relationship and helps children develop an appreciation for the written word. A child who has these opportunities may, for example, demonstrate understanding that authors write texts to communicate meaning by pointing to the text when pretending to read a story. Children assign meaning to environmental print, storybooks, and informational texts by using knowledge of topics and language associated with particular texts when retelling stories or sharing new information with others.

- **Word recognition and spelling.** The greater a child's familiarity with a variety of written language text formats including environmental print, books, and drawings, the easier it is to acquire concepts about sounds, letters, and words. Stage 0 (Chall, 1983) is a logographic phase of "visual cue reading" (Ehri, 1996) in which novice readers attend to "selective cues" rather than to specific associations of spelling and sound (Juel, 1996). During the "selective cue" phase of decoding, novice learners rely on limited orthographic information in their efforts to distinguish one word from another. Gough et al. (1983) describe this as "code reading," but to avoid confusion, Ehri (1996) has renamed this logographic phase as "visual cue reading." Ehri (1996) notes that visual cue readers associate words with particular visual cues such as a word's shape or perhaps a logo such as the hexagonal shape of a stop sign. For this reason, novice reading is considered "pseudo-reading" because children rely heavily on environmental and visual cues for print recognition (Chall, 1983; Ehri & Wilce, 1987; Gough et al., 1983; Juel, 1996). Novice readers may attend to a limited number of print characteristics such as the initial letters of words or specific features of individual letters, but the greater proportion of attention is reserved for the non-print context (Juel, 1996). The classic example is of a child who may retell a familiar story with the aid of pictures so well that one might think the child is actually decoding the printed words. However, novice learners are not yet glued to print. They may know that "real" reading requires the decoding of text rather than story telling based upon pictures, but they are not yet ready to give their full attention to the printed text.

  During the novice literacy phase, children learn to recognize and name the letters of the alphabet. They come to understand that alphabet letters are a distinct group of graphic symbols. Learning to print letters, and especially learning to write one's own name are important predictors of a child's future success as a reader and writer. Further evidence of novice literacy is found in a young child's developing metalinguistic awareness of language forms, especially letters. A child who refers to elements of a letter's form when attempting to draw a letter's shape for example, is using a feature of written language as an object of thought.

Perhaps the most important indicator of future success in reading and writing, however, comes in the child's developing phonemic awareness, or "the ability to deal explicitly and segmentally with sound units smaller than the syllable" (Stanovich, 1988). Research has identified phonemic awareness as a critical factor in successful spelling (Ehri, 1987; Treiman, 1984) and as an ability that discriminates normal and disabled readers (Stanovich,1986). Children, of course, normally develop the ability to understand spoken language without direct instruction in the units of speech, but it is the explicit knowledge of these discrete units that has been identified as a primary factor in learning to read (Yopp, 1992). While not a sufficient condition for success in learning to read, phonemic awareness appears to be a necessary condition because children who do not develop this ability have great difficulty learning to read successfully. Adams' review of the research (Adams, 1990) suggests that it is critical for children to be able to link phonemic awareness to a knowledge of letters.

By age 5, children are typically aware of words and syllables as discrete units in speech as evidenced by the ability to segment multi-syllabic words into syllables and tapping or counting syllables. They can also delete a syllable, giving an appropriate response when asked to, for example, "say cowboy without the cow." In kindergarten, children identify rhymes when given examples and match initial consonants of words with the same beginning sounds. Partial phoneme segmentation by segmenting a spoken syllable into two parts (m-an) and the ability to blend two phonemes into one signal readiness for instruction in the letter-sound relationships of phonics, a decoding strategy that beginners acquire during the next phase of early literacy development (Rath, 1994, pp.109-110). When novice readers are on the cusp of beginning reading, they will apply their developing phonemic awareness in incipient decoding of letter-sound relationships and reading simple words.

- **Comprehension and composition.** The ability to comprehend and compose written text begins with connections between printed forms and meaning. During the novice literacy period, attentiveness to such print concepts as left-to-right and top-to-bottom orientation when reading English texts, for example, paves the way for linking meaning to form (Clay, 1993a). Further connections are established when children use pictures and spoken language to support the meaning of written text that cannot be read independently as yet. The heavy reliance on context clues is a mark of novice literacy which will fade as children develop independent reading strategies during the next phase of early literacy. Even when relying on pictures, however, it should be obvious that novice learners are differentiating pictures from print and learning to pay special attention to print as the primary vehicle for transmitting the author's message.

  Sometimes children will reveal their attentiveness to print by finger pointing to particular written segments as a text is read aloud. Another behavior of novice literacy learners is the addition of letters or words to drawings which often leads to reference to the letters or words when telling a story about a picture that has been drawn. The

novice literacy phase is also the time when children learn that a text's structure carries information about its meaning and actively compose a variety of texts such as greeting cards, letters to family and friends, lists, and stories.

- **Functional use of written language.** Novice literacy learners are learning that the language and topic choices writers make have to do with the purpose of communication and the writer's perception of the audience's prior knowledge. Among the functions for which novice literacy learners use written language are informing the reader or writer about ideas, events or objects and retelling stories. Novice readers are likely to retell stories using structural elements such as beginning, middle, and end; sequence or causality, and literary language. Retellings are not merely picture labeling but reference details that are either provided directly in the text or can be inferred from textual information. They also use written language as part of play, interaction with others, and daily-living routines.

Phase II: BEGINNING READERS AND WRITERS[4]

The beginning literacy phase roughly characterizes the literacy behaviors of children ages 6-8 when children are typically in grades kindergarten-grade 2. Concepts about oral and written language that beginning literacy learners are acquiring include the following:

- **Learning how to mean.** Beginning readers and writers are generally confident in their spoken language conversational skills. They "know how to do things with words" and can use this knowledge to convey meaning both explicitly and implicitly. Beginners understand the meaning of some 4,000 words in spoken language, but even by the conclusion of this phase, can only read 600 words with comprehension. Beginners use their knowledge of spoken language in learning more about written language, gradually becoming more attentive to the similarities and differences of oral and written language styles of formality with respect to vocabulary and grammar.

  No matter what the purpose of written language, beginners are constantly faced with trying to make sense of written language through communication or creation of meaning. The driving force toward achieving conventional reading and writing is a deeper understanding of the author-reader relationship. Beginning readers are learning to comprehend an author's message and construct meaning by filtering that message through their background knowledge. In turn, beginning writers are learning to establish an intent to communicate as the basis for creating a written message that they hope the reader will comprehend given the reader's prior knowledge of the topic, text structure, etc.

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[4]For a more detailed discussion of beginning reading instruction, see Liebling, C.R. (1994). Beginning reading: Learning print-to-sound correspondence. In. S. Brody (Ed.), *Teaching reading: Language, letters & thought.* Milford, NH: LARC Publishing, 143-176.

- **Word recognition and spelling.** More advanced phonemic awareness evidenced by final sound matching and segmenting of simple spoken words (consonant vowel-consonant) and the blending together of two more complex segments (CV-C, C-VC, CC-VC) paves the way for a child's success with phonics as a primary decoding strategy for linking meaning and form. Some beginners will even be able to blend three spoken phoneme segments (C-V-C or CC-V-C); blending generally precedes complete phoneme segmentation in which children can say, tap, count, or mark spoken phonemes. The latter task is not usually mastered until the advanced beginning phase of early literacy (Rath, 1994, p.110). A deeper understanding about spelling/sound relationships enables further development of metalinguistic awareness. In turn, adding concepts of words to the ability to talk about letters as objects of thought further strengthens the foundation for decoding print to access meaning.

  The central achievement of beginning literacy is the development of strategies for recognizing and spelling words independently. Children draw upon their prior knowledge of letters and letter names and phonemic awareness and their growing attentiveness to the communicative power of written language as they tackle the task of decoding and encoding words.

  Children make great strides in their ability to recognize words during the beginning reading and writing phase of early literacy. Stage 1 of the decoding stage models (Chall, 1983) captures both the "phonetic cue" phase of initial reading and the "alphabetic" phase of phonological recoding typical of children ages 6-8 who are in kindergarten- grade 2 (Ehri, 1996). The phonetic cue phase is characterized as "rudimentary alphabetic" because children are now processing some of the letters in reading words and are beginning to make limited associations of letters and sounds such as the initial or final letters of words (Ehri, 1996). Towards the end of this phase, children become cipher readers who can phonologically recode words (Gough & Hillinger, 1980).

  Deliberate attention to word identification is the hallmark of this phase. During beginning literacy, learners are experimenting with decoding print. This concentration on individual letters and the blending of letters into words sometimes results in halting reading or what Chall has called, being "glued to print." Although accuracy may be the beneficiary of the beginner's slow speed, educators often worry that comprehension and composition of meaning will suffer. This observation has led some educators to encourage children to skip over words they cannot immediately decode so that attention can be focused on meaning rather than the accuracy of decoding. However, Chall (1983) makes the convincing case that taking the time to learn to decode accurately during beginning reading eventually and rather quickly results in reading behaviors focused on critical thinking and text comprehension. Since "over 94% of the different words children read occur fewer than ten times in every million words of text" (Adams, 1990, p.34), it is crucial that learners become automatic decoders of

words as quickly as possible so that their attention in reading can focus on meaning. Ehri further supports this perspective in noting that although phonics instruction teaches beginners rules and operations that are sometimes inaccurate because of irregularities, "such artificial devices may have pedagogical value in getting readers to attend to and do the things that enable them to become skilled recoders" (Ehri, 1996, p.401). This may be why explicit phonics instruction in which children learn specific sound-symbol associations and blending of sounds to form words is more effective than implicit phonics instruction in which children read whole words and learn to distinguish spelling-sound patterns. For Ehri, Stage 1 readers need frequent opportunities to practice reading words by associating sounds with symbols that conform with the most common and regular relationships and blending sounds to identify words. Furthermore, the ability to encode accurately supports the rapid decoding of written words, and the rapid decoding of written words enhances children's ability to spell conventionally.

While beginning reading may be a time of "strategy imbalance" in which an over-reliance on sounding out can sometimes lead to pronunciation of nonsense words that have no meaning, this is a critical hurdle because learning to decipher is viewed as absolutely essential to advancement as a reader and writer of an alphabetic language. Indeed, the ability to associate spoken words with written symbols in decoding is one of the most clear distinguishing characteristics of good readers who use their spelling/sound knowledge successfully in word identification (Lieberman & Shankweiler, 1985; Perfetti, 1985). This ability, not the use of context, distinguishes good readers who can recognize words purely on the basis of orthographic information from less able readers who are much more likely to rely heavily on context (Stanovich, 1986). Thus, while a number of cueing systems do support text comprehension, these researchers assert that the spelling/sound cues are more central to efficient reading than are others. "A child who learns the code has knowledge that can enable him to read no matter how the semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic cues might conspire against him. No matter how helpful they are to reading, these cues are not really a substitute for the ability to identify a word" (Perfetti, 1985, p.239).

Beginning readers demonstrate their developing independence by using a variety of decoding strategies to read simple texts of predominantly one syllable words. Using phonics, children associate letters and sounds, and blend sounds into known words containing consistent letter-sound correspondences. Through decoding by analogy, children learn spelling patterns of common word families. Beginners also use sight recognition as a decoding strategy in rapid identification of grammatical function words such as "the," and phonetically irregular content vocabulary such as "beautiful." Alphabetic cues sometimes are helpful in identification of sight words, but more often than not, children learn these words as unanalyzed wholes. Over time and with practices, words that were initially decoded using phonics or analogy become over learned and are recognized automatically as sight words. This process significantly

speeds up reading, leading to the automaticity that is the mark of fluency.

The use of graphic or spoken language context in support of the meaning of written language continues to be a strategy for decoding, especially for less able beginning readers. As children rely more heavily on the linguistic context of written text and grow more confident in their phonics and decoding by analogy abilities, however, the use of context and prior knowledge of topic and language structure become predicting and confirming strategies rather than primary approaches to decoding (Vellutino, 1991).

The ability to spell is related to writing, reading fluency, and vocabulary development (Adams, et al., 1996). Learning to spell involves the use of articulation to associate sounds and letters in spelling. Children pronounce words and rely heavily on their phonemic awareness and developing knowledge of letter-sound relationships and letter names to write the letters of sounds they hear. At this stage, however, spelling is often inventive because young children are attempting to use their developing phonetic abilities.

- **Comprehension and composition**. Beginning readers are learning how to comprehend a text's message by employing strategies for predicting and confirming meaning. Opportunities to preview text by attending to a story's title, cover, overview, or illustrations help to establish a context for reading. Opportunities to relate a story's theme to personal experience and prior knowledge further enhance the likelihood that children will comprehend the author's message. Children are also learning that reading for meaning involves much more than decoding words as they learn about different types of text structures such as stories and informational prose, engage in story retelling, questioning, summarizing, and rereading text for information in support of a point of view.

  To establish the connection between meaning and form, beginning readers and writers continue to rely heavily on spoken language. Spoken language serves to "contextualize" print and serves as a familiar bridge to meaning. When asked to reread or retell a story or a composition, a child may use finger-pointing as a means of establishing voice-to-print matching. Further evidence that children are learning to associate printed forms with meaning is apparent when children are able to retell stories that they have written phonetically, even when adult readers are unable to read the text. Children are learning that written text carries precise meaning; more often than not, a child's retelling of a composition written in invented spelling will remain consistent in its message over several retellings. Finally, evidence of connections between meaning and form are found in the compositions of young children who are developing strategies for producing conventional texts by copying, asking for spellings, dictating, and writing correctly spelled words.

- **Functions of written language**. Whether children are reading and writing for pleasure, social interaction, intellectual pursuit, or to regulate behavior, the understanding that writers and readers strive to establish communication with one another underlies both meaning and function in written language. During the beginning early literacy period, children are deeply involved in experimenting with written language as a means of communication. Learning how to become more precise in communicating meaning when the writer and reader are separated in time and space is a significant challenge of functional written communication. When writing a friendly letter to a close acquaintance, for example, young children are learning that writers tend to use a less formal conversational style of written language that includes terms of salutation and closing reserved for friends and family members. Young children are also learning that books tend to be written in a more formal style of language which sometimes includes common literary phrases such as "Once upon a time" and distinctive vocabulary or grammar.

PHASE III: ADVANCED BEGINNING READERS AND WRITERS

The advanced beginning phase roughly encompasses children ages 7-9 who are generally in grades 1-3. During this phase, children are learning the following concepts about oral and written language.

- **Learning to make meaning**. By the end of this phase, most children comprehend some 9,000 spoken language words and can read with comprehension more than 3,000 words. Confidence in understanding the nature of the author-reader relationship is an important feature of advanced beginning reading and writing. By the conclusion of the phase, children understand more fully the communicative power of written language.

- **Word recognition and spelling.** The stage models of reading acquisition characterize advanced beginning literacy as a time of confirmation, fluency, and "ungluing" from print (cf. Chall, 1983; Ehri & Wilce, 1987; Gough et al.,1983; Juel, 1996). Stage 2 (Chall, 1983) describes a shift from phonetic recoding to decoding by analogy and orthographic reading that leads to automaticity in decoding (Ehri, 1996). At the beginning of Stage 2, readers are using their knowledge of sound-symbol relationships to decode by analogy. This involves recognizing similarities of whole words that share similar spelling-sound patterns. From an understanding of such analogous relationships, children move to an orthographic phase in which readers immediately "analyze words into orthographic components without phonological conversion" (Ehri, 1996, p.405). "Although some additional, more complex phonic elements and generalizations are learned during Stage 2 and even later, it appears that what most children learn in Stage 2 is to use their decoding knowledge, the redundancies of the language, and the redundancies of the stories read. They gain courage and skill in using context and thus gain fluency and speed (Chall, 1979, p.41).

The hallmark of this phase is automaticity which results when spelling becomes "amalgamated" with sound (Ehri, 1987) and associations become rapid. Now readers are focusing on units of meaning, morphemes, rather than units of sound, phonemes, and letters associated with sounds, graphemes, that predominated during Stage 1. Orthographic reading supports the acquisition of structural analysis decoding skills that facilitate recognition of multi-syllabic words and promote automaticity in sight recognition of words. This enables readers to bypass phonology as they focus on the meaning of printed words recognized by their written spelling. Contextual information assists the reader in predicting and confirming meaning of decoded text. The achievement of advanced beginning literacy, thus, enables young readers to engage in wide reading that, in turn, provides the decoding practice which leads to a large pool of automatically recognized words. Even fluent readers, however, sometimes return to the use of selective cues or phonetic cues when they encounter foreign or highly unusual words.

Continued advances in understanding and using the forms of oral and written language solidify gains made during the beginning reading phase. Once beginning readers have some awareness of phonemes and their corresponding graphic representations, research has indicated that further reading instruction heightens their awareness of language, assisting then in developing the later stages of phonemic awareness The final phonemic segmentation skills are acquired which enable the blending of three spoken phoneme segments (C-V-C) and complete phoneme segmentation in which children can say, tap, count, or mark phonemes. Some children continue to find separating consonant clusters into individual phonemes a difficult task throughout the elementary years and even beyond, but most will master this ability by the end of grade 3. Advanced phonemic segmentation ability is an excellent predictor of a child's readiness for the decoding by analogy and structural analysis word recognition strategies that are emphasized during this phase of early literacy development.

Advanced early literacy learners not only have a fully developed concept of words, but they are expanding their linguistic knowledge to include an understanding of morphemes as the smallest, meaningful unit of language. In the previous phase, they developed an appreciation of phonemes as the smallest sound unit in language, but an understanding of morphemes enables yet another decoding strategy, structural analysis, that leads to the rapid identification of multi-syllabic words. During this period children acquire such structural components as prefixes, suffixes, and roots; this contributes not only to advances in grammatical understanding, but also to substantial growth in vocabulary and an ever-increasing stock of sight words. Furthermore, gaining an appreciation for the etymology of words is an effective approach to improving conventional spelling ability. Children are developing conventional spelling ability by drawing upon common word families, alternative spelling patterns, and their knowledge of morphemes as the basic unit of meaning.

By the conclusion of the phase, advanced beginners have access to the full range of decoding and strategies. Once the basic letter-sound relationships have been acquired and advanced phonemic awareness is established, the earlier reliance on phonics as the primary decoding strategy now shifts to an emphasis on decoding by analogy and structural analysis when words are not automatically recognized. The use of context and phonics as decoding strategies become secondary sources of information to predict or confirm the accuracy of decoded text.

- **Comprehension and composition.** A significant advance made during this phase is greater use of comprehension and composing strategies to improve the communication of meaning in written language. Early use of these strategies may be apparent during the beginning phase, but it is not generally until the advanced beginning phase that children are ready to focus their attention in reading on comprehension and their attention in writing on composition. One set of strategies is metacognitive in that cognition itself becomes the object of thought. For example, readers are now learning to monitor their comprehension of text as they read, rereading or scanning text quickly depending on text complexity and the purpose of reading. They are also learning to predict and confirm meaning, question, summarize, and refer to the text as they identify main ideas and details, draw inferences, and respond critically to the author's ideas.

  In addition to reading comprehension strategies, learners are also developing writing process strategies such as brainstorming, consideration of the audience's prior knowledge of topic, and use of literary elements in composition. Frequent opportunities to draft compositions, conference with adults and peers, revise and edit, and publish final copy to be shared with wider audiences help children build confidence in communicating meaning through writing. During the advanced early literacy phase, children are learning to use knowledge of story structure and literary elements to compose stories that include settings, characters, and some plot elements. Evidence of growth in conveying point of view, mood, and style may also be apparent in children's compositions. In addition to narrative structure, children are also learning how to organize expository text to present information in a logical and systematic manner.

- **Functions of written language**. By the conclusion of the advanced beginner early literacy phase, children are learning to use reading and writing to meet a variety of personal needs and to be part of the classroom literate community and of literate society. Whether reading or writing for pleasure, school, or home, children now have the fundamental skills and strategies they need to use written language as part of daily life.

By the end of third grade, advanced beginning early literacy learners have achieved a level of independence as conventional readers and writers. Their pool of automatically decoded sight words is sufficiently large to enable fluent reading with comprehension of age-appropriate texts,

and they have access to the full range of encoding strategies necessary for writing meaningful text. At this point, the learning to read and write phase of literacy is complete, and children embark on a lifetime of reading and writing to learn. In short, the realization of advanced beginning reading and writing ability signifies achievement of the national early literacy goal and district or state early literacy standards.

Elements of a Balanced, Core Early Literacy Program

An effective, balanced instructional program will support children's advancement from one phase to the next in the acquisition of early literacy. Such instruction involves much more than the explicit teaching of the skills and strategies of reading and writing. These skills and strategies certainly form the core of the early literacy instructional program, but it is important to remember that the context in which these skills and strategies are taught can make the difference between children who read and write only when they have to and those who are motivated to read and write for a wide-range of communicative purposes. There is no doubt that motivational factors contribute substantially to literacy acquisition. The careful consideration and inclusion of lively, motivating, and enriching experiences that engage children in purposeful and meaningful reading and writing can be a determining factor in children's ultimate commitment to be successful readers and writers. Research has identified five key elements that contribute to an enriched early literacy instructional context (Braunger & Lewis, 1997; Snow et al., 1998; Sweet, 1993):

- **Developmental Appropriateness of the Instructional Environment**

  Developmental appropriateness does not preclude engaging children in print rich early literacy environments that include adults who use reading and writing everyday for cognitive and communicative purposes. Indeed, developmental appropriateness necessarily includes building the foundation for future academic success throughout the early literacy period.. "A child who is 8 years old and is not a reader is a child in deep trouble at school...we know now that reading instruction does not start in preschool, or kindergarten, or first grade...we learn to read, as Frank Smith says, from the 'company we keep,' and children are in the company of adults from the moment they are born" (McGill-Franzen, 1992, p.57).

  Unfortunately, however, many communities in the United States continue to utilize reading readiness approaches rather than early literacy curricula prior to grade 1. Unlike an early literacy curriculum, a reading readiness curriculum tends to emphasize visual, shape, and color discrimination worksheets rather than print-rich environments, significant exposure to books, and the building of such skills as phonemic awareness that have been shown to be excellent predictors of success in reading. In a review of K-1 supplementary materials of basals used in Texas, for example, researchers found a preponderance of worksheets, but few books for teachers to read-aloud or for children to read independently (Hiebert & Papierz, 1990).

One of the major challenges in early literacy education is to create developmentally appropriate environments that are respectful of children's intellectual, personal, and social development and simultaneously engage them in a print-rich curriculum with many opportunities to use language and literacy for communicative purposes (Neuman & Roskos, 1997). It is only recently that educators have fully understood the importance of the emergent literacy environment in fostering those early literacy behaviors that must be acquired before kindergarten if all children are to begin more formal schooling "on a level playing field." This observation suggests that a major focus of early literacy instruction must be to seek a balance of environmental considerations that honor young children's development and still provide sound opportunities for acquiring spoken and written language competence.

- **Meaningful Reading and Writing within Varied Social Contexts**

The functions of spoken language that Halliday (1977) described as the foundation for the meaningful use of spoken language such as to inform, to narrate, to humor, and to persuade also underlie the use of written language for communicative purposes. Functionality is an essential element of the social context of language use. Within varied social contexts, different types of interactions and roles help children become attentive to the communicative purpose of written language. It is this emphasis on written language use in its social context that has led to the conclusion that the degree to which early literacy instruction immerses children in meaningful literacy activities is likely to influence significantly many children's success as early literacy learners (Hiebert & Raphael, 1998).

- **The Constructive Nature of Reading and Writing Processes**

Both reading and writing are constructivist processes in which readers and writers create meaning in transactions with text (Rosenblatt, 1978). This understanding of the constructive nature of comprehension and composition suggests that a balanced early literacy instructional program should include daily opportunities to use prior knowledge in acquiring new knowledge, to acquire and practice using strategies for making and sharing meaning, and to acquire and practice using the skills that underlie effective comprehension and composition of text (Anderson et al., 1985; Rumelhart, 1980; Pearson et al., 1990). Adults can further enhance children's understanding of reading and writing as constructive processes by modeling strategies as part of explicit teaching of strategies (Roehler & Duffy, 1991).

- **Integrated Spoken and Written Language**

Written language learning best occurs within the context of familiar, spoken language. Research on the similarities and differences of spoken and written language (Rubin, 1978) conducted during the past 30 years has resulted in the embedding of written

language within the more familiar spoken language that children use daily for communication. It is a child's confidence in using spoken language that serves as an important scaffold for the acquisition of written language because spoken language helps to "contextualize" the more meaning of written language whose author is separated in time and space from the reader.

Thirty years ago, reading was a separate subject from the language arts. Reading instruction consisted largely of reading stories in basal anthologies, teacher-posed comprehension questions to which students responded, and follow-up workbook activities that provided practice on specific reading skills such as finding main ideas or drawing conclusions. Language arts activities had second class status in most elementary classrooms. Spelling tests and spelling bees; occasional writing of book reports, creative stories, or newspapers; and rare opportunities for dramatization of stories or choral reading formed the bulk of the language arts curriculum. Today, however, educators are recommending "a strong literature, language, and comprehension program that includes a balance of oral and written language" (California Department of Education, 1996, p.4) and instruction that highlights language processes along with the traditional focus on products.

One of the most distinguishing aspects of this focus on integration is the realization that the development of writing abilities during emerging literacy contributes substantially to the acquisition of early reading abilities (Putnam, 1994). As a result, today's preschools, kindergartens, and lower elementary schools emphasize early writing far more so than was the case 30 years ago. Furthermore, a substantial body of research on the writing process has revealed the supportive roles that writing plays in reading development and reading plays writing development through the early literacy period (Pearson & Tierney, 1984; Hansen & Graves, 1991). Providing children with daily opportunities to engage in authentic communication activities in which they have some choice regarding topic and are encouraged to discuss what they read will promote critical reading and writing.

Another element of integration is the availability of good literature for young children and the incorporation of quality literature into the early literacy instructional program. Unlike the relatively limited selection of texts available to children years ago, today's children can choose from a tremendous selection of multi-cultural children's books. Providing children with daily opportunities to read books of their own choice as well as books recommended by adults is a central feature of motivating early literacy classrooms. Book clubs and small group discussion on literature selections encourage multiple perspectives on text meaning (Eeds & Wells, 1989; Galda, 1983). Encouraging children to read daily with their families further enhances exposure to books. Finally, while reading aloud to children has always been part of quality instruction, today there is an even greater awareness of the substantial impact that reading aloud by fluent readers has on children's future development as readers and

1991; Morrow, 1992; Sulzby & Teale, 1996).

- **Explicit Instruction in the Skills and Strategies of Reading and Writing**

  Within a motivating and enriching early literacy instructional context characterized by the factors described above, explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, word recognition, and comprehension strategies will enhance children's acquisition of literacy as they progress through the early literacy developmental phases. Explicit instruction, it should be noted, implies a clear and systematic approach in which teachers "model, explain differences, show significance, and guide students" in literacy acquisition. This definition contrasts with that of "direct instruction" which implies "skill decomposition," an approach more clearly associated with special education techniques (Braunger & Lewis, 1997; Pearson, 1996).

Three approaches to reading instruction predominate the teaching of decoding and comprehension skills during the beginning reading and writing phase of early literacy: whole language in which children learn to read whole, meaningful texts often characterized by predictable story lines or patterned language, but are not exposed to the systematic teaching of specific sound/symbol relationships; embedded phonics in which children first participate in decoding by analogy lessons following a sequence of rhyming word families and later participate in repeated readings of trade books in which specific word families are intentionally embedded (Hiebert et al., 1992); and direct code in which sound/symbol correspondences are systematically introduced in language activities followed by reading and spelling isolated words and, finally, by reading a series of increasingly complex books in which sight words and phonetically spelled words are introduced and reviewed systematically (Snow et al.,1998).

In a recent comparative study of these approaches in eight Houston, Texas elementary schools in which a high percentage of students are at risk for reading failure (Foorman et al.,1998), it was reported that "children taught via the direct code approach improved in word reading at a faster rate and had higher word recognition skills than children receiving both the standard whole language instruction and the research-based phonics embedded in whole language instruction." Although it was noted that students in the embedded phonics instruction did have more positive attitudes toward reading than those in the direct code classrooms, "the amount of improvement in word reading skill appears to be associated with the degree of explicitness in the instructional method. Furthermore, children with higher phonological processing scores at the beginning of the year demonstrated greater improvement in word reading skills in all instructional groups. Explicit instruction in the alphabetic principle was more effective with children who began the year doing poorly in phonological processing" (Snow et al., 1998, p.206).

When educators today cite the need for balanced instruction, what they are really referring to is a renewed commitment to the explicit teaching of important reading and writing skills and strategies along with an emphasis on meaningful reading and writing. To accomplish this, educators are now calling for a well-crafted mix of language and literature-rich activities and

"organized, explicit skills that include phonemic awareness, phonics, and decoding" strategies that enable fluent reading and writing" (California Department of Education, 1996). Many educators today view such a "well-balanced core language arts program" in regular classrooms as the "first line of defense against literacy failure" (Walmsley, 1997, p.20).

A Summary of the Elements of Balanced, Core Early Literacy Programs that Incorporate the Key Concepts of Each Developmental Phase

Novice Readers and Writers: Preschool, Kindergarten, and Grade 1 Instructional Programs

Despite a generation of readily available public and private preschools and mandatory kindergarten in almost every state, many children currently begin elementary school with limited exposure to print-rich environments and marginal funds of knowledge about the world generally and about language specifically. If young children are to be ready to learn when they begin primary school, they must acquire the novice literacy behaviors that are the foundation of the beginning reading and writing curriculum. No longer content with preschool and kindergarten environments that do not actively engage children in using both oral and written language for a variety of developmentally appropriate purposes, early childhood educators today recognize fundamental understandings about print are acquired prior to grade 1 (McGill-Frazen, 1992). Unfortunately, however, pre-first grade education has not yet achieved its potential to provide children with the preparation they need for success in grade 1. An important message of the recent National Research Council's report on preventing reading difficulties in young children is that a "priority mission of every school district in the United States should be to provide good kindergarten literacy preparation to all children" (Snow et al., 1998, p.195). To that priority should be added a closer examination of the benefits of universal preschool as part of the public system and greater commitments to coordinate services between public elementary schools and community agencies that support families of young children to enhance the early literacy education for all children.

The instructional program for novice readers and writers should be constructed so that, by the end of kindergarten, children will know letter names, shapes, and some letter sounds; have initial phonemic awareness, print concepts, and syntactic awareness; have listening, discussion, oral storytelling and re-telling skills; and have the ability to participate in group writing of stories (Honig, 1996). Examples of appropriate research-based best instructional practices (Braunger & Lewis, 1997; California Department of Education, 1995; Honig, 1996; McGee & Richgels, 1996; Snow et al., 1998; U.S. Department of Education, 1998a) for novice readers and writers include:

- Classrooms organized as learning centers that encourage embedding language and literacy within discovery and play activities.
- A print-rich classroom environment that is not over-stimulating but encourages associations of spoken words with signs in the classroom. An important component of a print-rich environment is a class library that contains a wide variety of texts: picture books, storybooks, poems, and informational texts, big books, patterned or predictable books, books on tape,

computer-based reading, and children's magazines.

- Oral language activities, especially those involving drama and puppetry, to build receptive and expressive language and verbal reasoning.
- Phonemic awareness activities such as rhyming games, singing songs, and reciting poems. Explicit instruction in sound blending and segmentation tasks is also appropriate.
- Print and syntactic awareness activities to build purpose of reading, knowledge of the structure of written text, awareness of print features such as directionality, and knowledge of words, letters, sentences, and paragraphs.
- Independent reading in which children have daily opportunities to read high quality books of their own choosing independently or with a peer.
- Daily interactive storybook and nonfiction reading aloud of high quality children's literature by fluent readers. During reading aloud, the reading process is modeled and print concepts are developed.
- Reading response discussion of books read at home and at school to promote appreciation and text comprehension; story telling and re-telling. Teachers involve children in creating language experience stories or engaging in reading process activities: pre-reading predictions and setting the context for reading; during reading questioning and response conversation, and post-reading activities to encourage reflection on meaning.
- Explicit instruction in letter recognition using magnetic letters and blocks to name letters and identify letters by shapes.
- Writing activities including group story writing, language experience stories, writing to promote phonemic awareness and letter knowledge, and independent writing of stories encouraging the use of invented spelling. Even young children should be encouraged to use computers for writing along with daily opportunities to write and draw using paper and writing implements.

Beginning Readers and Writers: Kindergarten - Grade 2 Instructional Programs

The instructional program for beginning readers and writers should be constructed so that children will be able to read age-appropriate texts independently by the end of grade 2. During this period, children should read between 100 and 200 "little books" that are systematically graded in complexity. By the end of grade 2, they should be able to read grade level books with 95% accuracy, appropriate speed and inflection, and with comprehension. To achieve this goal, the beginning reading and writing program should provide instruction that will help children achieve the following abilities: advanced phonemic awareness in sound blending and phonemic segmentation tasks; use of sound/symbol relationships, sound blending, syntactic awareness, and knowledge of word families in decoding and encoding; recognition of basic high-frequency words and word families in reading connected text; use of such comprehension skills as summarizing the main idea, predicting and confirming meaning, drawing inferences, and self-monitoring; coordination of decoding and comprehension strategies in reading for meaning; and writing and spelling words that children can read; writing meaningful stories and informational prose using a combination of invented and conventional spelling, pictures and print, and conventional print concepts, and simple grammar (Honig, 1996, p.127).

Examples of research-based best instructional practices (Braunger & Lewis, 1997; California Department of Education, 1995; Honig, 1996; McGee & Richgels, 1996; Snow et al., 1998; U.S. Department of Education, 1998a) which will help children achieve beginning reader and writer abilities include:

- Learning centers that encourage literacy skills embedded in play and discovery activities.
- A print-rich classroom environment that encourages association of print with signs in the classroom. A print-rich environment includes a class library that contains a wide variety of texts including picture books, storybooks, poems, and informational texts. Children have daily opportunities to choose books they want to read or reread independently or with a friend
- Oral language activities including singing and reciting verses, dramatizing stories and rhymes, and discussing word meaning, ideas, books, and experiences.
- Phonemic awareness: Phonemic awareness activities include identifying words that do not belong in a sequence; singing songs that involve play with phonemes or require substitution of words and word parts in rhyming patterns; and clapping, tapping, and body movements to indicate the number of syllables or patterns in songs, stories, or words. Children then advance to language word play; segmenting words into component sounds and blending sounds into real words, and changing the beginning, middle, or ending of words to create new words.
- Alphabet recognition and writing: Acquiring knowledge of all letter names by sorting letters or identifying prominent letters in words; learning to write letters; tracing letters in sand; making letters out of clay; playing with letter blocks, magnetic letters; recognizing and writing all upper and lower case letters.
- Shared, interactive storybook reading through daily reading aloud at home and at school. Fluent readers model the reading process, and children share in the reading.
- Daily guided reading activities involve explicit teaching of word recognition and comprehension strategies. Explicit instruction in comprehension strategies includes making storyboards or other graphic organizers to show story structure elements such as setting, characters, and plot events and guided discussion using thinking strategies such as questioning and summarizing. Explicit instruction in word recognition strategies includes phonics, decoding by analogy, use of linguistic context to predict and confirm decoding, and sight words. Children should be encouraged to self-correct mispronunciations and self-monitor text comprehension helps to build confidence in one's ability to read independently. They should also be encouraged to use other aspects of the linguistic context such as sentence structure, word boundaries, and capitalization and punctuation cues to predict and confirm the accuracy of decoding and comprehension. Language experience stories are also used to enhance connections between spoken and written language and between reading and writing.
- Independent reading through daily opportunities to read high-quality literature chosen by individual children. By the end of grade 2, children should be reading independently easy trade books with predictable and patterned language.
- Shared writing activities include language experience stories written by the teacher along with a group of students.
- Daily guided writing activities including instruction on the writing process. Formal spelling instruction should begin in the second half of grade 1. By the end of grade 2, children should

be using conventional spelling for simple, regularly spelled words along with invented spelling.

- Independent writing activities include daily opportunities to write a variety of texts as part of play, learning center activities, labeling of art, and writing for a variety of communicative purposes. Writing is shared in conferences and "public" readings while sitting in the "author's chair". A classroom library of children's "published" stories is established.

Advanced Beginning Readers and Writers: Grades 1-3 Instructional Program

The focus of reading and writing instruction during grades 1-3 is to help children build their capacity to use literacy for learning. Beginning in grade 4, it is presumed that children have learned the fundamentals of reading and writing. Thus, it is imperative that instruction in grades 1-3 helps children consolidate their understandings of written language. Especially during grades 2-3, children should be expected to read as many fiction and nonfiction texts as possible because it is through practice in reading that they become automatic decoders of words and gain confidence in their ability to read independently. Development of automaticity in decoding, considered to be a lower level skill, frees the learner to focus attention on such higher order thinking processes as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of information.

Honig (1996) suggests that children in grades 2-3 read between 25 and 35 age-appropriate books per year. In the course of such reading, children will acquire 3,000-4,000 new vocabulary words that are not in their everyday spoken vocabulary and build their capacity to comprehend more complex ideas. Literacy instruction now shifts to a focus on reader response, discussion, and writing about ideas expressed in text.

While the focus of instruction gradually shifts to an emphasis on comprehension, there are many advanced decoding and encoding skills that children acquire during this phase. Explicit instruction in structural analysis involving syllabication of multi-syllabic words, the study of roots and affixes, spelling instruction focused on common patterns, and continued emphasis on decoding by analogy further helps children consolidate their understanding of the alphabetic principle.

Examples of research-based best instructional practices (Braunger & Lewis, 1997; California Department of Education, 1995; Honig, 1996; McGee & Richgels, 1996; Snow et al., 1998; U.S. Department of Education, 1998a) which will help children become advanced beginning readers and writers include:

- A print-rich classroom environment that includes a class library containing a wide variety of texts including picture books, storybooks, poems, and informational texts. Children have daily opportunities to choose books they want to read or reread independently or with a friend.
- Oral language speaking and listening activities include choral reading for audiences, presentations to the class and parents, dramatizations and puppet shows, and engaging in discussion to improve comprehension and thinking skills.

- Advanced phonemic awareness activities include phonemic segmentation and sound blending by changing or deleting the beginning, middle, and ending sounds of words to make new words.
- Daily guided reading provides explicit instruction in word recognition strategies. Decoding by analogy and structural analysis are emphasized in the decoding of multi-syllabic words, but there is a decreased emphasis on phonics. Becoming attentive to rhythm, pace, and intonation while reading aloud with a partner or listening to one's own tape recorded helps to build fluency and automaticity. Explicit instruction in reading comprehension strategies includes activities for self-monitoring by rereading, scanning, questioning predicting/confirming, and summarizing. Use of comprehension approaches such as reciprocal teaching to guide children through the construction of text meaning (Palinscar et al., 1993) and programs that enhance background knowledge and concept development such as CORI - Concept Oriented Reading Instruction (Guthrie et al., 1996) help to focus discussion and writing topical knowledge and higher order thinking skills.
- Independent reading: Children maintain reading logs of independent reading with a goal of reading at least 25 books per year that are increasingly of greater complexity. Opportunities to participate in book club discussions builds motivation for reading books of interest.
- Daily guided writing provides explicit instruction in the writing process and the use of correct spelling, syntactic structure, and writing conventions. Children have opportunities to learn to write a variety of text types including creative stories and informational texts for a variety of audiences. Instruction in the writing of nonfiction includes access to informational sources including the library and the Internet, note-taking, and organization of ideas by topic sentences and paragraphs. Word study to build vocabulary and spelling ability is a regular part of instruction. Opportunities to write a variety of texts for a variety of communicative purposes. Children are encouraged to use computers for writing as well as to use paper and writing implements.
- Independent writing: Children have daily writing opportunities to write stories, letters, and informational text. Opportunities to share writing with peers in conferences, writing clubs, and in the "Author's Chair" are encouraged.

The following table provides a set of indicators that educators can use to assess the extent to which the core early literacy program is sufficiently balanced. During the course of the early literacy period, all of the indicators should be clearly evident in the instructional program because, in total, they all contribute to children's success in achieving the early literacy goal. However, educators must decide the degree to which particular indicators should be emphasized within a phase of development to produce the desired effect of balance. Teachers may want to use the table's emphasis key to establish the elements and degree of balance for an ideal program that meets the needs of novice, beginning, and advanced beginning students within each classroom and to contrast the characteristics of an ideal program with those of the current program. Teachers may also want to use the indicators to verify that the developmentally appropriate core instructional program is also standards-based.

Table 1

Indicators of Balanced, Core Early Literacy Instructional Programs

Balanced Early Literacy Programs **Phases of Early Literacy Development**

I. General Characteristics of the Learning Environment	**Novice** Most commonly: ages 5-7; preschool, kindergarten, and grade 1	**Beginner** Most commonly: ages 6-8; kindergarten-grade 2	**Advanced Beginner** Most commonly: ages 7-9; grades 1-3
Child-centered, developmentally appropriate but academically enriching curriculum			
Classroom library with large collection of children's literature, displays, and room for several children to read; wide range of classroom reference books			
Technology: Availability of computers and software for children's reading and writing; availability of Internet access			
Writing center with room for several children to write and conference; "author's chair"			
Literacy activities are embedded within play centers; literacy is embedded within dramatic play activities			
Volunteers and aides provide mentoring and individual attention and help to lower the ratio of teachers to children			
II. General Characteristics of Curriculum and Instruction			
The district's English language arts curriculum is aligned with state and/or national standards and includes frequent opportunities to engage in meaningful reading, writing, and discussion.			
Key ❸A predominant and clearly visible part of the balanced early literacy instructional program (4-5 days per week) ❷A frequent element of the core instructional program (2-3 days per week) ❶An infrequent and relatively de-emphasized element of the core early literacy instructional program			

II. General Characteristics of Curriculum and Instruction (continued)	**Novice**	**Beginner**	**Advanced Beginner**
The actual, taught curriculum within each classroom is aligned with the district's standards-based curriculum.			
The classroom curriculum includes literature study units with broad themes that allow for choice, reading and writing of varied genre, and integrated oral and written language activities.			
Each unit includes goals that are aligned with state standards, a performance assessment linked to the unit goals, curriculum to help students learn the skills and strategies they will need to perform well on the performance assessment, and a variety of assessments to gauge student achievement and teaching effectiveness.			
Lessons include active learning strategies in which students work in a variety of groupings: whole class, small group, peer pairs, and independently.			
Lessons include active teaching practices in which teachers demonstrate reading and writing, guide interactive discussions, and provide direct teaching through modeling the skills and strategies of early literacy.			
III. Reading Activities			
Environmental Print			
Environmental print such as labels, informational charts and lists is readily apparent in the classroom. Teachers frequently pronounce words that are part of the classroom's environmental print, drawing children's attention to specific features.			
Shared Reading; Reading Aloud			
Teachers and children engage daily in reading aloud or telling stories, poems, or informational books. Children actively participate in shared reading. Teachers use interactive reading aloud techniques. Texts are selected for the quality of language and meaning. Favorites are read and reread.			
Key ●A predominant and clearly visible part of the balanced early literacy instructional program (4-5 days per week) ●A frequent element of the core instructional program (2-3 days per week) ●An infrequent and relatively de-emphasized element of the core early literacy instructional program			

III. Reading Activities (continued)	**Novice**	**Beginner**	**Advanced Beginner**
Big Books: Teachers use big books to draw children's attention to print concepts. They are also used to demonstrate reading strategies such as previewing, predicting and confirming meaning while reading, and response to literature.			
Little Books and Traditional Size Books: Children read little books to gain practice and familiarity with specific text features. Traditional size books of those read as Big Books are also available for children to follow along or to reread independently.			
Guided Reading			
Decoding: Teachers provide explicit instruction through modeling and scaffolding to support's children's learning of specific decoding skills and strategies that are essential to achieving early literacy. Decoding strategies include recognizing and identifying the alphabet; reading one's own name; decoding using alternative strategies including sound-letter relationships, decoding by spelling-sound patterns (analogy), structural analysis, use of graphic and linguistic context, and sight word recognition.			
Comprehension: Children read selections from basals or children's literature. Teachers use a variety of text types in providing instruction on reading process strategies: i.e. previewing, predicting, questioning, summarizing, confirming, responding to literature, monitoring one's own reading comprehension, re-reading, finger pointing, pacing, etc. Children are also learning about the characteristics of particular types of texts. Comprehension skills include identifying main ideas and details, summarizing plot, building view of character, distinguishing fact from fiction, drawing conclusions and making inferences, etc.			
In small group instruction, the teacher guides reading activities. At first, teachers scaffold text reading considerably, but gradually, children read complete texts on their own. Each child has a copy of the text. Specific skills and strategies are addressed as related to specific texts.			
Independent Reading			
Key ❸A predominant and clearly visible part of the balanced early literacy instructional program (4-5 days per week) ❷A frequent element of the core instructional program (2-3 days per week) ❶An infrequent and relatively de-emphasized element of the core early literacy instructional program			

III. Reading Activities (continued)	**Novice**	**Beginner**	**Advanced Beginner**
Children have frequent opportunities for children to read books of their own choice when reading independently or with a partner.			
Children have opportunities to share their independent reading through alternative types of books reports: re-enacting a portion of a book, video-book reports, book bag reports, book-talks, book clubs, literature response groups, etc.			
IV. Writing Activities			
Shared Writing			
Teachers engage children daily in interactive teacher-led writing activities. Teachers model writing strategies throughout the school day. Language experience stories written jointly by the teacher and children are printed on chart paper and are used as the basis for shared reading activities.			
Big Books: Teachers and children create big books based upon favorite stories. Big Books created by the class are used as the basis for shared reading activities.			
Teachers and children talk about writing as they write to help children develop metalinguistic awareness.			
Guided Writing			
In small groups or whole-class mini-lessons, teachers provide explicit instruction in the components of the writing process such as editing and proofreading skills; conventional spelling; opportunities to write a variety of genre including fiction, poetry, and newspaper articles; and handwriting. Children develop a set of high frequency spelling words that can be used in writing.			
Teachers hold regular conferences with individual students or small groups to discuss children's writing.			
Key ❶A predominant and clearly visible part of the balanced early literacy instructional program (4-5 days per week) ❷A frequent element of the core instructional program (2-3 days per week) ❸An infrequent and relatively de-emphasized element of the core early literacy instructional program			

IV. Writing Activities (continued)	**Novice**	**Beginner**	**Advanced Beginner**
Independent Writing			
The teacher provides daily opportunities for children to write on topics of their own choice. Young children are introduced to the writing process and are given increasing opportunities to engage in rehearsing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing.			
Children have frequent opportunities to share writing: i.e. "Author's Chair," peer pair sharing, conferences; published books placed in class or school library.			
V. Assessment			
Each lesson within a unit includes daily informal assessments such as observational notes, checklists, and conference reflections for the purposes of improving teaching and learning.			
Each unit includes an end-of-unit performance assessment linked to the unit's goals as related to state standards. Performance assessments are evaluated using a rubric to reflect proficiency.			
Narrative reflections on teaching effectiveness are used as data in decisions as to needed modifications to improve instruction.			
Student work is maintained in a portfolio that includes work samples of writing across the curriculum, journals, reading and writing logs, assessments of specific tasks such as alphabet recognition and concepts about print, running records of oral reading including miscue analysis and story retellings. Teachers and students reflect regularly on the quality of student work.			
Additional sources of data used to determine program effectiveness include beginning and end-of-year profiles of student progress, state assessments linked to state standards, and other standardized testing.			
Key ❸A predominant and clearly visible part of the balanced early literacy instructional program (4-5 days per week) ❷A frequent element of the core instructional program (2-3 days per week) ❶An infrequent and relatively de-emphasized element of the core early literacy instructional program			

V. Assessment (continued)	**Novice**	**Beginner**	**Advanced Beginner**
Data from all adults including teachers, aides, and aides, and students contributes to assessments of the degree to which the core early literacy program is sufficiently balanced. Periodically, decisions are made as to whether particular elements within the program need to be enhanced or modified.			
Key ❶A predominant and clearly visible part of the balanced early literacy instructional program (4-5 days per week) ❷A frequent element of the core instructional program (2-3 days per week) ❸An infrequent and relatively de-emphasized element of the core early literacy instructional program			

Options for Balanced, Core Early Literacy Programs

For those educators who want to adopt or adapt an existing model for a balanced, core early literacy program, there are two options: adopting an entire-school reform model such as *Success for All* (Slavin et al., 1996b) that includes a well-defined core early literacy program; or adopting a reading and language arts skill- and content-based reform model that can serve as one component of comprehensive reform or as the stand-alone English language arts program such as *Guided Reading* (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Alternatively, educators can elect to avoid particular models, choosing instead to adopt a published basal reading or language arts series or design thematic or literature-based units of instruction that can serve as one component of an entire-school reform or as the stand-alone core early literacy program. Regardless of the chosen option, it is important to establish the alignment of the core early literacy program's components with district, state, or national standards and to use performance-based student assessment data to continuously improve the quality of instruction. What follows is an examination of the features of two core early literacy programs: *Success for All* and *Guided Reading*.

Success for All: An example of a balanced, core early literacy program as one component of an entire-school comprehensive reform model

The 1994 re-authorization of Title I encourages high-poverty schools to combine federal funding from multiple sources for the purpose of adopting and implementing school-wide reform models. The intention of these models is to provide comprehensive services to all children within a high-poverty school. The Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program provides funding for high-poverty schools "to improve student achievement...by implementing comprehensive school reform programs that are based upon reliable research and effective practices and include an emphasis on basic academics and parental involvement"(U.S. Department of Education, 1998b, p.1). Nine components of integrated, coherent reform must be included within a school's proposal. Among these components are evidence of effective, research-based methods and strategies; a comprehensive design with aligned components; professional development; measurable goals and benchmarks; and parental and community involvement. While the specific reform models that are referenced in the legislation (PL 105-78) such as the *Coalition of Essential Schools*, *Accelerated Learning*, *School Development Program*, and *Success for All* need not be included in a school's proposal, "the CSRD legislation encourages schools to examine successful, externally developed comprehensive school reform models with proven evidence of effectiveness" (U.S. Department of Education, 1998b, p.5). In effect, schools are being encouraged to adopt "off-the-shelf" comprehensive school reform models in the quest to raise standards of achievement for all students. The claim is that adopting existing models is more efficient because local educators don't have to reinvent the wheel, but will nevertheless end up with an approach that is broad in scope including research-based perspectives on curriculum, instruction, and teaching materials; professional development; and school organization. While these models as well as locally-developed approaches can be expensive to implement, the current legislation directs state departments of education to make minimum awards of $50,000 to eligible schools whose proposals for comprehensive reform address the nine identified criteria.

"Improving classroom quality is the best and most cost-effective means of improving overall student achievement and preventing at-risk students from falling behind (Fashola & Slavin, 1998, p. 376). Despite this generally recognized observation, it is interesting to note that of the 26 entire-school reform models that successfully meet at least some of the nine identified criteria (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1998), only one offers an explicit, balanced core early literacy curriculum as part of the comprehensive approach: *Success for All*. The great majority of the entire-school reform models are built from guiding principles that are intended to raise student achievement by adherence to the model's philosophical perspective. As long as curriculum content and teaching practices are true to the guiding principles, the actual content and skills of instruction can be whatever local educators decide is relevant and important. While most of the models do include the early elementary years as part of their scope, only a few offer specific early literacy curriculum. Of these, the curriculum tends to be tailored to the particular philosophy or approach of the model, but is not necessarily a balanced, core early literacy program that provides both meaningful opportunities to engage in reading and writing connected text and explicit instruction in the skills and strategies of reading and writing.

The collection of school reform models that are currently available differ wildly in their purpose and focus, thereby having the potential to confuse educators who are trying to sort out the most appropriate models for particular schools. Appendix A is provided to help educators focus on those models that, at least partially, address the early literacy core instructional program. Appendix A identifies each of the 26 models, notes the grades for which the model is intended, describes the primary approach or philosophy, and indicates whether the entire-school model includes a balanced, core early literacy program.

The lack of a prescriptive core early literacy instructional program or even a balanced early literacy core within an entire-school reform model is not necessarily a negative condition. When educators have a solid grasp of children's knowledge about language and literacy and developmentally appropriate curriculum, they can certainly create a program comprised of commercial texts and a variety of instructional materials that is both standards-based and consistent with the philosophy of the selected entire-school reform model. However, while building a core program in this manner may be acceptable to many schools, those with pressing needs to raise the standards of student achievement seem to be more inclined to adopt highly prescriptive models that promise a balanced, early literacy classroom program with proven results.

High poverty elementary schools with high percentages of students who are struggling to achieve early literacy are turning in record numbers to *Success for All* because it offers such a balanced, research-based early literacy curriculum as part of a comprehensive model for prekindegarten to grade 6 (Slavin et al.,1996b). *Success for All's* goal is to accelerate the progress of at-risk students. It includes a balanced classroom reading and language arts as the core component of the model, professional development of teachers, intensive tutoring for children who are struggling, and family services. *Success for All* was established in 1987; as of January, 1998, it was in 747 school nationwide.

The program begins with kindergarten and grade 1 language development activities including StaR, storytelling and retelling activities in which children listen to, retell, and dramatize children's literature. Teachers use "big books" to share stories and build print concepts, and they engage children in composing language experience stories. Peabody Language Development Kits are also used to develop receptive and expressive language.

Reading Roots is the novice and beginning reading program that is introduced during the second term of kindergarten and continues through the spring of grade 1. Beginning in grade 1, students are flexibly grouped cross-age and cross-grade for 90 minutes of reading instruction daily. This adaptation of the "Joplin Plan" allows a teacher to work with one reading level and to increase the time that a teacher can work with a group of students. All certified teachers in a school, whether they are classroom teachers or specialists, are teaching relatively small groups of children whose reading abilities are similar.

An examination of a *Success for All* Reading Roots lesson quickly reveals traditional instruction. The session begins with a rereading of a previously read "little book" that includes phonetically regular words within a meaningful story line and is followed by an oral review of letters and words. The teacher then introduces new material using, perhaps, the alphabet song and tongue twisters related to specific letters. The lesson progresses with the naming of objects beginning with a certain letter sound, sound pronunciation, writing words beginning with the letter in both upper- and lower-case, and practice reading of isolated words beginning with the letter and words in sentences.

All of the preceding activities lead up to the shared reading of a simple story to provide specific practice in decoding skills that are currently being studied. Children progress through 48 little books divided into four levels in the course of the Reading Roots program. Each story is read over a two or three days. The teacher begins by reading a story aloud and engaging the group in discussion. The teacher then reviews those words that the children will be reading. Flash cards are used for pronunciation; words are then used in sentences and spelling exercises. When reading the text, the children read those words that they are able to decode, and the teacher reads the remaining words. Sometimes, children are given rebus drawings within their text to help them "read" irregularly spelled words. The teacher is provided with a script for discussion questions and an elaborated story line. After group reading, children have opportunities to re-read the text with a partner or during the 20 minutes of required reading at home each night.

Reading Wings is the beginning, advanced beginning and intermediate reading program. It begins with the first reader or primer level that is generally introduced during the second term of first grade and continues to the end of elementary school. The program is an adaptation of *Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition* (Stevens et al.,1987) which involves students in cooperative learning team activities as they focus increasingly on comprehension strategies, more advanced decoding, and writing process instruction involving texts that are read and creative writing. Explicit instruction is provided in the course of reading texts from the school's basal reading series; however, *Success for All* has developed teacher guides to support the reading of

these texts, and teachers are expected to use these materials rather than those provided by the basal publisher. In addition, children have access to classroom libraries and are expected to read independently at home every night for at least 20 minutes. Books read at home are shared in school book clubs and presentations to the class.

A key feature of the program is on-going assessment which takes place every eight weeks. Assessments are conducted either by reading teachers or the program's facilitator. They are closely associated with the instructional sequence, so that children can be properly placed in an instructional group for the following eight-week period. Assessment is also intended to identify students who are falling behind, especially those in grade 1, who also receive intensive tutoring by certified teachers. To round out the services, *Success for All* provides family support through teams that work to increase parental involvement in their children's education.

Perhaps one of the greatest strengths of the program is its commitment to professional development. Training facilities across the country are working to support the implementation of the program. *Success for All* requires that 80% of a faculty approve the program's implementation. Once approved, all teachers are expected to be part of the intervention. This expectation necessitates both a strong commitment on the part of the teachers and on the part of the trainers to support teachers' developing understanding about the teaching of reading and language arts. Training includes sessions for the full staff prior to implementation and coaching throughout the year. In addition, the full-time on-site facilitator assists teachers in implementing the program's components.

In order to be eligible to receive federal funds for school reform, schools must submit evidence that the model they have selected is effective. The issue of effectiveness is a thorny one for many of the proposed school reform models have limited research evidence to support claims of improvements in student achievement. Those that do provide evidence tend to have data from studies conducted by researchers closely associated with a program's development rather than external validation. This may constitute bias, leading to continuing questions about the merits of particular programs.

According to its developers, however, *Success for All*, does not fall prey to this criticism because it is the "most extensively evaluated in schools serving many students at risk"(Fashola & Slavin, 1998, p.372). Evidence of the program's replicability is found in its implementation across the country in a variety of urban and rural school districts whose students are considered at-risk. In addition, the program has been adopted by some suburban or low poverty districts because of it published data showing substantial improvements in student achievement.

Success for All incorporates "effect size" as an indicator of effectiveness in comparisons of student achievement across programs. An effect size is the difference between the means of experimental and control groups divided by the standard deviation of the control group. For example, an effect size of 1.0 = 100 points on the SAT; an effect size of +.25 or more "would be considered educationally significant, but not necessarily statistically significant" (Fashola & Slavin,

1998, p.372). Outcomes of *Success for All* have been studied in longitudinal evaluations in 19 schools compared with 19 control schools (Slavin et al., 1996a). In comparisons of some 4,000 students on the standardized Durrell Oral Reading Scale and several of the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test scales, statistically significant differences in effect size ($p<.05$) are reported. These differences are especially significant for students in the lowest quartile. In such comparisons, *Success for All* students score "about three months higher in the first grade and 1.1 years higher in fifth grade on reading measures" (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1998, p.104). In addition, the longer a school participates in the program, the stronger the results. Finally, evidence of reductions in retentions and special education placements are also being reported in *Success for All* schools.

Does this mean that *Success for All* students are achieving the national literacy goal of independence in reading age-appropriate materials by the end of grade 3? In data reported in Slavin et al. (1996b, p.202), the grade equivalent reported for all end-of-grade 3 *Success for All* students is 3.26 compared with 2.71 for control students. However, the grade equivalent drops to 2.23 for *Success for All* students in the lowest quartile. This is still substantially better than the 1.79 reported for control students in the lowest quartile, but clearly these students have not yet achieved the national early literacy goal. Slavin et al. (1996b) conclude that a total of 15.7% of *Success for All* third graders were performing at least one year below grade level, and 3.9% were two years below grade level; in contrast with the respective percentages of 38% and 11.7% for control students. Thus, while there is clearly room for further gains, the *Success for All* program does appear to contribute to substantial improvements in achievement.

The future appears bright for students involved in *Success for All*. However, several concerns have been raised regarding the evidence, the capacity of *Success for All* to meet the professional development needs of all the schools that are interested in the program, and lingering issues concerns the standardization the curriculum versus the creative abilities of local educators to design high quality, balanced early literacy instruction (Olson, 1998). First, while the available research data has provided evidence of success in contrasts of matched samples of students, as yet a clear alignment of *Success for All's* curriculum with state standards has not been documented and state standards-based assessment data has not been made available. Like any quality instructional program, *Success for All* must be held accountable to standards and to performance-based assessment. In addition, the limited amount of research evidence from sources external to the developers has led some educators to question the objectivity of reported research findings (Walberg & Greenberg, 1998).

Second, the continued growth of *Success for All* clearly depends upon the extent to which its professional development network can meet the ongoing needs of educators. Currently, *Success for All* has indicated its intent to limit implementation to schools within districts that already have *Success for All*, districts near training centers, and districts willing to involve a cluster of more than four schools in the program. The scarcity of other comparable models is severely impacting *Success for All's* capacity to provide service to all of the schools that would like to adopt the model. This reflects the reality of being, for all practical purposes, the only balanced, core early

literacy program that is part of a currently available entire-school reform model. Without a doubt, alternative models are needed that effectively serve the same purpose and intent.

Finally, while both experienced and inexperienced teachers offer glowing support for *Success for All*, the degree of standardization from classroom to classroom is both a strength and a weakness of the program. Students and their families may be assured of comparable instruction from classroom to classroom within a school or perhaps school to school across town or even across the nation. What one gains in standardization, however, one may also lose in creativity or in a teacher's initiative, commitment, and engagement in the curriculum. Many teachers who are tired of being blamed for students' poor achievement may welcome the opportunity to be part of a program that asserts, "If you follow me to the letter, your students will improve." Others, however, may be turned against teaching because a standardized curriculum offers relatively little room for diversity in teaching styles, materials, or activities.

***Guided Reading*: An example of an English language arts skill- and content-based reform**

Precisely because most of the entire-school models do not include prescriptive core early literacy programs, there is a need for skill- and content-based English language arts reform models that can serve as the core component of an entire-school model or can be a school's stand-alone early literacy program. Like *Success for All's* core program, if an alternative is to be adopted or adapted from existing programs, it must be balanced, easily replicable and widely available (Fashola & Slavin, 1998, p.370). Title I schools who elect this option to comprehensive school reform assemble their own set of components into a "homegrown" comprehensive model. While many schools have yet to take advantage of this opportunity to combine funds for comprehensive reform, there is increasing use of Title I funds for locally constructed school reform models. Such approaches may consist of a single core early literacy program or a combination of a variety of English language arts programs, each of which serves a particular purpose. Alternatives generally utilize a combination of texts and materials created by the developer along, existing commercial texts and instructional materials, and literature-based units of instruction created by local educators that are consistent with the model's philosophy or approach.

To adopt or adapt an existing core early literacy program or create such a program from a number of more specialized approaches, schools can turn to innovations that have been designated as exemplary or promising by peer reviewed panels of early reading experts, programs previously identified by the National Dissemination Network, or programs that emerge from design competitions such as the New American Schools initiative (Slavin, 1997b). To evaluate whether existing English language arts skill- and content-based reform models are likely to be good candidates for a balanced, core early literacy program, schools must consider the nature of the early literacy curriculum and instructional approaches, the evidence of effectiveness and replicability, and the availability of ongoing professional development, coaching, curriculum-based assessment, and collegial support. In combination with other important elements of a comprehensive model such as an intensive tutoring program for at-risk children, additional opportunities for tutoring by volunteers such as those that are part of the U.S. Department of Education's *America Reads*

initiative (Pinnell & Fountas, 1997a,b), and family support, it is quite possible to create a homegrown comprehensive model that is an effective alternative to an "off-the-shelf" comprehensive early literacy models.

Appendix B provides a summary of English language arts skill- and content-based reform models such as *Breakthrough to Literacy, First Steps,* and *Strategic Teaching and Reading Project* that are listed in a recent catalog of school reform models (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1998). All of the noted programs, however, can only be considered as partially acceptable because they must be effectively combined to create a balanced, core early literacy curriculum. *Breakthrough to Literacy* comes closest, but it only provides materials through grade 2 and is predominantly a technology-based instructional model. *First Steps* does include some instructional activities, but its real intent is to serve as an assessment tool for establishing performance benchmarks at particular checkpoints. *Cooperated Integrated Reading and Composition* (CIRC) is intended as a reading comprehension and writing program. It has been adapted by *Success for All* as part of its Reading Wings component and, as such, contributes to a balanced, core early literacy program. The *National Writing Project* is focused on writing, and *Reading Recovery* is not really a core program at all, but rather an intensive tutoring opportunity for at-risk first graders.

One program that is not listed in the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's recent catalog of school reform models (1998) but potentially may serve as an effective alternative to *Success for All's* core program is *Guided Reading* (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). *Guided Reading* is an example of a research-based whole language, embedded phonics approach that holds the potential of being highly motivating because children read trade books that have been graded carefully for difficulty at the same time they are engaged in some explicit instruction in reading skills and strategies. *Guided Reading* is the core early literacy program that parallels *Reading Recovery* (Clay, 1993b), the intensive tutoring intervention for at-risk first graders. It is intended for use in schools that are building a homegrown comprehensive model using both *Guided Reading* and *Reading Recovery* as key components and may hold special appeal for those educators who are uncomfortable with the prescriptive nature and considerable standardization offered by *Success for All.*

Guided reading "enables children to practice strategies with the teacher's support and leads to independent silent reading" (Fountas & Pnnell, 1996, p.1). As an example of "good first teaching," guided reading includes a balance of reading aloud to children, shared reading, and literature circles for extension activities involving thinking and constructing meaning. Explicit instruction occurs during guided reading sessions when children of similar reading abilities work with a teacher. Guided reading begins with previewing a new story during which prior knowledge of the story's topic or theme is elicited; the children's attention is focused on visual information, questions to be answered during reading, predictions, and information to look for while reading.

During reading, the teacher models reading strategies, and children have opportunities to practice the strategies as they read independently, either softly or silently. They receive help from

the teacher as needed. A teacher might call attention to specific aspects of words, integrate writing with reading to help in word analysis, use pocket charts in teaching word families, and sentence strips to direct attention to letters, letter-sound relationships, and blending of word parts and reading of words within sentence context. Emphasis is also given to building vocabulary and spelling through patterns.

After reading, the teacher and children discuss the story, respond critically, and engage in extension activities. Children then have an opportunity to reread the story independently or with a partner. The developers recommend 10-30 minutes per day of organized, structured reading groups with the balance of English language arts instruction devoted to a mixed ability whole group, small group, and individual activities related to a wide range of reading and writing experiences.

Ongoing assessment, dynamic groupings, and the "matching of books to individual children" (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996, p.107) are essential elements of the program. The developers have created a continuum of graded trade books, and this continuum is used to provide children with a large source of appropriate reading texts. The resulting continuum of levels of books provides recommended reading for grades 1-3 and is offered as a trade book alternative to the children's reading selections in a basal series. The books do not have controlled vocabulary, but they do emphasize a variety of language patterns including word repetition and regular sound-symbol relationships.

What is unclear, however, is the extent to which there really is a systematic attempt to address all of the important decoding and comprehension skills and strategies as children progress through these books. It is appears that a teacher has considerable discretion in deciding the specific skills and strategies that are needed by individuals and is not held accountable for teaching a specific sequence. For this reason, only teachers who are comfortable with a somewhat less systematic, but still balanced program, may gravitate toward *Guided Reading*.

It remains to be seen whether *Guided Reading* will, indeed, prove to be a credible alternative to *Success for All* as there is no extensive research base as yet that schools can use to evaluate its effectiveness. In addition, the developers have only just begun to create a professional development network, so it will be some time before *Guided Reading* is likely to be used widely or endorsed as an English language arts reform model. Nevertheless, the program bears scrutiny and piloting by those schools that are knowledgeable about children's developing understandings of language and literacy and are prepared to be actively engaged in constructing a day-to-day standards-based early literacy program using *Guided Reading's* philosophy, general recommendations for approach, and continuum of reading texts.

Conclusion

Clearly, none of the currently available options is perfect. Both the prescriptive nature of *Success for All* and the more open-ended whole language-oriented *Guided Reading* have obvious strengths and potential weaknesses. Educators who elect to develop their own approach such as literature study units run the risk of failing to emphasize critical skills and strategies in a clear and consistent manner. Nevertheless, whatever approach is selected, the likelihood of its success increases when local educators are well versed in children's early literacy development and thoroughly familiar with appropriate instructional practices that will facilitate young children's acquisition of important understandings about language and literacy. Furthermore, no matter what the source, the core early literacy curriculum must be held accountable to alignment with district, state, or national standards and performance data. Whatever curriculum option is chosen, it is clear that "guidelines and procedures for aligning instructional goals and methods with research are urgently needed, as are policies for requiring empirical evaluation of their instructional efficacy (Snow et al., 1998, p.210). That is, it is important for local districts to set in place procedures for documenting that the local early literacy curriculum is research-based and is evaluated continuously for its effectiveness as related to improvements in student achievement. There is no doubt that the degree to which a core early literacy program is composed of "the right mix" of ingredients will reveal itself over time. Given a well-designed, balanced program, the public can expect that more students will achieve higher levels of proficiency on state assessments, and in turn, will achieve the national early literacy goal of independence in reading age-appropriate texts by the end of third grade.

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Appendix A
Entire-School Reform Models[1]

Name	Grades	Primary Philosophy or Approach	Balanced Core Early Literacy Program?
Accelerated Schools Project	K-8	Guiding principles: unity of purpose, empowerment plus responsibility, building on strengths; accelerate at-risk students	**No** subject-area programs provided by developer
ATLAS Communities	preK-12	Develop prek-12 pathways around a common framework; create a coherent K-12 education for all students	**No** subject-area programs provided by developer
America's Choice School Design	K-12	Development of performance-based standards and assessments; learning focused on achieving standards	**Partially** - standards-based curriculum with focus on early literacy and math, but no balanced core early program provided by developer
Audrey Cohen College: Purpose-Centered Education	K-12	Purpose-centered education; using knowledge to benefit global society; parental involvement, professional development including on-site visits	**No** - developer provides guides for units such as "We Work for Safety" (grade 1) that include early literacy activities, but no balanced, core early literacy program provided by developer
Coalition of Essential Schools	K-12	Set of common principles which emphasize personal responsibility for learning, "less is more," and graduation by exhibition	**No** subject-area programs provided by developer
Community for Learning	K-12	Collaboration of schools with community institutions; Adaptive Learning Environments Model of Instruction	**Partially** - inclusionary instructional model, but no subject-area programs provided by developer

[1]For more information about these models, see Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (1998). *Catalog of school reform models*, 1st ed. Portland, OR: Author.

Name	Grades	Primary Philosophy or Approach	Balanced, Core Early Literacy Program?
Community Learning Centers	PreK-Adult	Powerful learning experiences in active learning environments	**No** subject-area programs provided by developer
Co-NECT Schools	K-12	Assists schools in comprehensive reform; critical friends; technology integration	**No** subject-area programs provided by developer
Core Knowledge	K-8	Curriculum topics based upon a set of concepts and skills for core subjects	**Partially** - content topics provided, but no balanced, core early literacy program provided by developer
Different Ways of Knowing	K-7	Arts curriculum integrated into social studies, math, and science	**No** balanced, core early literacy program provided by developer
Direct Instruction	K-6	Highly scripted basic skills instruction for English language arts and math	**Partially** - explicit, basic skills instruction in English language arts, but the program is not considered balanced
Edison Project	K-12	Private administration of schools, some of which are charter schools, intended to raise academic standards; emphasis on technology	**YES** - However, program uses **Success for All** as core early literacy program
Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound	K-12	Learning expeditions that include authentic projects, fieldwork, and community service	**No** balanced, core early literacy program provided by developer
Foxfire Fund	K-12	Collaboration between classroom and community	**No** balanced, core early literacy program provided by developer
High Schools That Work	9-12	High school program combining college prep and vocational education	**NA**
High/Scope Primary Grades Approach to Education	K-3	Emphasis on developmentally appropriate early education	**Partially** - program includes language and literacy "key experiences," but does not offer a balanced, core program
League of Professional Schools	K-12	Assists schools in becoming democratic institutions	**No** balanced, core early literacy program provided by developer

Name	Grades	Primary Philosophy or Approach	Balanced, Core Early Literacy Program?
Modern Red Schoolhouse	K-12	Promotes challenging curriculum, character education, and democratic principles	**Partially** - Mastery, individualized curriculum, but no explicit, balanced core program
Montessori	PreK-8	Emphasis on individual students achieving their potential through discovery learning, manipulative materials, multi-age grouping, etc.	Partially - Emphasis is on specialized materials and approach rather than balanced, core program
Onward to Excellence	K-12	Assists schools in building capacity for shared leadership	**No** subject-area programs provided by developer
Paideia	K-12	Focuses on equal educational opportunity for all in a one-track system of public education using Socratic method with an mphasis on acquisition of knowledge and development of skills	**No** subject-area programs provided by developer
Roots & Wings	PreK-6	Explicit instruction in math, science, and social studies; has joined with Success for All	**NA**
School Development Program	K-12	Focuses on building common purpose among stakeholders and planning for change	**No** subject-area programs provided by developer
Success for All	PreK-6	Explicit, balanced early literacy instruction; has joined with Roots and Wings and incorporated CIRC (Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition) into the design	**Yes** - balanced, core early literacy instructional program provided by developer
Talent Development High School with Career Academies	9-12	High school program emphasizing careers	**NA**
Urban Learning Centers	PreK-12	Thematic curriculum; connections between school and community; empowerment of learning community	**Partially** - content connections between standards and thematic curriculum, but no explicit, balanced, core early literacy program

Appendix B
English Language Arts Skill- and Content-based Reform Models[2]

Name	Grades	Primary Approach or Philosophy	Is a balanced, core early literacy program?
Breakthrough to Literacy	K-2	Computer-based instruction; Connecting oral language to print; literature-based instruction; some direct instruction on phonemic awareness; individualized pace	**Partially** - but does not support instruction beyond grade 2
Carbo Reading Styles Program	K-8	Emphasis on alternative reading styles; choral reading, echo reading, and recorded books for poor readers; individualized instruction	**No** - this is primarily a whole text reading by repetition approach
Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition	2-8	Direct instruction in comprehension; cooperative learning emphasis; integrated reading and writing activities	**NO** - this is a reading comprehension program. However, **YES** if in combination with Reading Roots and Reading Wings; Success for ALL has incorporated CIRC into its reading comprehension and writing program for students in grades 3-6.
First Steps	K-10	Tools to link assessment, teaching, and learning; developmental continua in reading, spelling, writing, and oral language	**Partially** - includes developmental continua and resource books associated with continua; primarily a means of defining performance at specified points
National Writing Project	K-16	Improving the teaching of writing	**NO** - this is a writing program
Reading Recovery	1	Intensive tutoring for at-risk first graders	**NO** - this is a tutoring intervention
Strategic Teaching and Reading Project	K-12	Professional development and emphasis on content area reading comprehension	**No**- this is a reading comprehension approach

[2]For more information about these models, see Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (1998). *Catalog of school reform models*, 1st Ed. Portland, OR: Author.